

## GOD'S CHALLENGE TO HIS PEOPLE

Jer. 2:18 And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?

Jeremiah prophesied during a very unenviable period in the history of the people of Israel. His name means, "whom Jehovah has appointed". He was the son of Hilkiah ("my portion is Jehovah") of the priestly family descended from Kohath ("assembly"), who was one of the three sons of Levi.

His people came to be dwelling in Anathoth, - about three miles north of Jerusalem, - when Joshua led the nation of Israel into the land of Canaan. It was one of the cities apportioned to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 21:18; I Chron. 6:60), but it was specified that the sons of Levi should live there. The sons of Levi were the only tribe who received cities but were not allowed to be landowners because unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not [*any*] inheritance: the LORD God of Israel [*was*] their inheritance (Josh. 13:33) ... The priests the Levites, [*and*] all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance. <sup>2</sup> Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD [*is*] their inheritance, as he hath said unto them (Dt. 18:1,2). ... In other words, the purpose God had for the tribe of Levi was to be given over completely to serving Him as priests.

In particular, the unenviable task to which God committed Jeremiah is presented in chapter one, v.5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, [*and*] I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Jeremiah remonstrated though, v.6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I [*am*] a child [ *he was about seventeen years of age*]. However, God wasn't prepared to be argued with, v.7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I [*am*] a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. <sup>8</sup> Be not afraid of their faces: for I [*am*] with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

The Lord continued to draw a bleak picture of what was about to happen to the children of Israel, v.14 Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. <sup>15</sup> For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. <sup>16</sup> And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. <sup>17</sup> Thou therefore gird up

thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. <sup>18</sup> For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. <sup>19</sup> And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I [am] with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.

So, Jeremiah was a Levite, - he belonged to the priestly tribe, - and he was being commissioned by God to prophesy in very difficult days a message his people would not want to hear. Now, not every priest was a prophet ... and not every prophet was a priest ... but Jeremiah was both.

We cannot stress how difficult the times in which he prophesied were. To a certain degree, the people were enjoying success and satisfaction ... but rumbling in the background was an underlying danger that was as the consequence of their spiritual rebellion against God ... and it was a spiritual rebellion they would not agree to accept, for example, Jer. 16:10 Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? or what *is* our iniquity? or what *is* our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?

And so, Jeremiah began his prophesying about a year after King Josiah's reforms. King Josiah reigned 640-609 BC, and he came to the throne when he was only eight years of age. To understand the situation better ... he was the great-grandson of King Hezekiah, who in the latter part of his reign did good in destroying the high altars of idolatry.

However, after Hezekiah's reign the spiritual status of the people of Judah greatly declined. His son, Manasseh, didn't follow in the footsteps of his father. Instead, he rebuilt the altars and reinstated the worship of idols, II Kings 21:4 he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

The son of Manasseh was Amon, and he continued the legacy of his father and encouraged further idolatry, II Kings 21:20 he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did. <sup>21</sup> And he walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them: <sup>22</sup> And he forsook the LORD God of his fathers, and walked not in the way of the LORD.

This then was the background out of which Josiah was born, - Amon was Josiah's father ... and yet, Josiah was the king who brought his people back to the Lord for it was during the twelfth year of *his* reign God's law was rediscovered and restored to the people ... and there was great revival amongst the children of Israel, II Kings 23:1 And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all [*their*] heart and all [*their*] soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.

During the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign (Jer. 1:2), - one year after the idolatry had been *smashed*, - Jeremiah became active as a prophet. ... You can read about the dark times Judah had been saved out of in II Kings 23:4-24 ... and in the closing verses of that chapter it is recorded, v.25 And like unto him [*Josiah*] was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there [*any*] like him. You would have thought this would have been a great time to have been a priest and a prophet ... a time when there had been revival in the land.

*However*, the damage had been done ... because of the previous consistent rebellious behaviour of Judah, v.26 Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. <sup>27</sup> And the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there. This was a prophecy relating to how God would ultimately muster the pagan forces of Babylon to sweep in and carry off His people into captivity in a foreign land. ... The people of Israel wanted to be free to worship idolatry ... now God was going to give them what they thought they wanted, and they would be carried off into a land where Jehovah was not known, and there they would suffer under the terrible yoke of godlessness and idolatry. It's an awful thing when God gives His rebellious people what they think they want ... for later, we read off their weeping in that land, Ps. 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. <sup>2</sup> We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. <sup>3</sup> For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us*

mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. <sup>4</sup> How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?

Just before that happened, though, Josiah's son Jehoahaz became king and reigned for three months, and he did [*that which was*] evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done (v.32). Then, it was the turn of Jehoiakim who reigned eleven years, v.37 And he did [*that which was*] evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. After him King Jehoiachin only reigned for three months (II Kings 24:8), v.9 And he did [*that which was*] evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

This introduced a truly disastrous time for the people because Nebuchadnezzar came and besieged Jerusalem (v.10), carried off many of the people into captivity, - including the king, - and ransacked and stole out of the palace, the temple, and out of everywhere his thieving hands could find valuables! At this point, Jehoachin's uncle became king (v.17), and Nebuchadnezzar changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah, but the state of the nation wasn't changed because, v.19 he did [*that which was*] evil in the sight of the Lord.

All this time, - in the background, - these things were happening because the people had rejected God, v.20 For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence. Therefore, under Zedekiah this judgment of God persisted for eleven years to the time they were carried away into Babylon. ... During this period, - about forty years, - Jeremiah was prophesying up to the captivity. Before it happened, *even*, he declared with tears and lamentations, the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people, for their idolatry, covetousness, deceit, cruelty, rebellion and contempt of God's word. ... So, that's what was happening!

God had been good to these people ... far better than they deserved ... and His goodness to them was as a consequence of the covenant He had made with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, - the Abrahamic covenant. He was faithful to them, even though they had turned their backs on Him. He had been infinitely more gracious to them than they had deserved. He had established them among the nations. He had brought them into their own land ... and their generation had the responsibility to keep it in accordance with their covenant, - the Mosaic covenant, - with Him! As far back as Deut. 8:19 God gave them, - and succeeding generations, - the warning, *And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish.* <sup>20</sup> As the nations which

the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God.

Now, incidentally, you will notice how this warning was for various generations of the Israelites ... not the Israelite nation as a whole. It is not saying that God was going to annul his covenant with Abraham and annihilate *all* the Jewish people or remove them from His covenant because if He had done *that* He would have broken the unconditional covenant He had made with Abram in Gen. 12. God doesn't break His Word. ... The covenant Jehovah entered into with Abram is as *steady* today as it was when it was first made ... However, different generations throughout the history of the Jews brought upon themselves the judgment of God ... and those generations suffered as a consequence. ...

And so, these people had to be punished. Jehovah had been good to them ... but He could not overlook their sin. He had reproved them often, but to no avail. He had sent His prophets, but the people wouldn't listen ... and He said to them through Jeremiah, 2:14 *[Is] Israel a servant? [is] he a homeborn [slave]? why is he spoiled?* <sup>15</sup> The young lions roared upon him, *[and] yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant.* <sup>16</sup> Also the children of Noph *[ancient Egyptian city of Memphis] and Tahapanes [in the Nile tributary, next to the Mediterranean Sea] have broken the crown of thy head.* <sup>17</sup> Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way? <sup>18</sup> **And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?**

What are we doing here, studying this subject? How does this Old Testament passage relate to us? What's the message for us today? ... We are coming to the Lord's Table shortly ... and what do we see here in this passage of Jeremiah that relates to the death of Christ, His punishment for our sin, and His victory over the grave and over the devil?

Well, look at it like this ... You and I, - like the children of Israel, - have been chosen of God ... We are saved because of His sovereign choice. God looked upon us in grace as He looked upon His beloved children of Israel, as He chose them out of the other nations, Dt. 7:6 *For thou [art] an holy people unto the LORD thy God ...* <sup>7</sup> The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people ... <sup>8</sup> But because the LORD loved you. Paul wrote how the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; <sup>14</sup> ... gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people,

zealous of good works. Similarly, the apostle John wrote, [I Jn. 4:19](#) We love Him, because He first loved us. ... That's grace! ... That's God's saving grace!

You and I, believer, as we prepare to come to the Lord's Table, we have been washed in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ ... we have been redeemed through the eternal plan and purpose of God ... we belong to a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light ([I Peter 2:9](#)) ... What then has the world to offer us?! ... What attraction do the idols of Babylon have for us? ... Surely none, or so it ought to be!

Sadly, we live in times when many who profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour are so willing to trivialise the worship of the God of Josiah ... and God gives them over to their fascinations and infatuations. He gives them what they think they want, and it ends in His judgment! ... God has blessed His people with many good and genuine times of revival ... but often, - when they see their ungodly neighbours, - they want more! They are all-too-ready to exchange those great privileges of grace for the *poison* of Manasseh, Amon, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah!

We have tasted from the fountain of which Josiah has tasted ... the better drink of which our Saviour speaks, [whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life \(Jn. 4:14\)](#). ... However, the danger facing the people of God today is that the muddy rivers of the world's expressions have become overwhelmingly appealing ... The polluted waters have made their way up the estuary, and they are soiling the waters of God's pure truth, and that was the basis for why Jeremiah asked the people, [2:18](#) *And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?* ...

... Why should you go hankering after waters that bring no satisfaction ... waters that are defiled, and bear little of the ingredients with which the people of God have been blessed with in the past? ... To put it into the language of today ... Why would you move away from the Gospel of saving grace and replace it with something that ultimately is a fake and a counterfeit for it has no saving power because its dependence is not upon the Saviour? ... We could listen to "them" saying, "You must update, you must modernise" ... but how can we, when the Gospel with which Christ has saved us is already perfect, and needs no change!

As we come to this Table tonight, it reminds us that all Christ has done for us is complete, it is finished, for it meets the perfect requirements of God for our salvation. Christ died for us. He took upon Himself our sins. He bore the absolute and exhaustive burden of God's wrath to set us free from the eternity of God's condemnation! There is no other Gospel that saves for there is no other Gospel that satisfies God's perfect holiness ... only that which depend completely in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ! We have no need to look away!

When you are looking to the Lord and His glory and His victory, you have no need of nothing *to do in the way of Egypt*. There is no satisfying taste in the *waters of Sihor [the river Nile]*. There is nothing for us *in the way of Assyria* ... nothing even that flows in the waters of the great river Euphrates. Jeremiah was drawing the picture that from as far as the Nile, in the west, to the Euphrates, in the east, - such a vast area, - there is nothing apart from God that would satisfy His people! ... As the hymn writer wrote, "I tried the broken cisterns, Lord, But, ah, the waters failed; Even as I stooped to drink they fled, And mocked me as I wailed" ... There is only one water that truly satisfies God's people and it is the living water that flows from the pure river of the water of life, from out of Heaven. Ps. 103:11 *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.* <sup>12</sup> *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*

... Around this Table, we are invited to eat of this bread, which is the symbol of the precious broken body of our Saviour ... and we are invited also to drink of this cup which is the symbol of the precious blood that flowed from His perfect body, "Oh! Precious is the flow, That makes me white as snow; No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus". There is no other Gospel. There is no other Good News whereby the sinner is saved and by which the saint is kept ... It is not to be corrupted with any of the 'rivers of the pollutant gospels' of this world ... It is *this* Gospel alone that saves, ... and it is to be preached until Jesus comes again in His triumphant glory. Let's keep holding on to it, for it is as precious now as it has ever been ... and it will continue to be precious for always ... and this we remember and give thanks to God for as we gather round His Table. Amen.